

Ralph Northam

Ralph Shearer Northam (born September 13, 1959) is an American politician and physician serving as the 73rd Governor of Virginia since January 13, 2018.^[1] A pediatric neurologist by occupation, he was an officer in the U.S. Army Medical Corps from 1984 to 1992. Northam, a member of the Democratic Party, served as the 40th Lieutenant Governor of Virginia from 2014 to 2018 prior to winning the governorship against Republican nominee Ed Gillespie in the 2017 election.^[2]

Contents

Early life, family history, and education

U.S. Army and medical career

Early political career

Senate of Virginia (2008–2014)

Lieutenant Governor of Virginia (2014–2018)

Governor of Virginia (2018–present)

Election

Tenure

Response to Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center lawsuit

Yearbook discoveries and apology for blackface

Pledge to combat racial inequity

Covid 19 pandemic response

Political positions

Abortion

Civil rights

Confederate monuments

Criminal justice

Felony larceny threshold

Limited reinstatement of parole

Policy on suspended driver's licenses

Death penalty

Economy

Education

G3 initiative for state-funded tertiary education

Environment and energy

Family leave and child care

Ralph Northam



Northam in 2018

73rd Governor of Virginia

Incumbent

Assumed office

January 13, 2018

Lieutenant Justin Fairfax

Preceded by Terry McAuliffe

40th Lieutenant Governor of Virginia

In office

January 11, 2014 – January 13, 2018

Governor Terry McAuliffe

Preceded by Bill Bolling

Succeeded by Justin Fairfax

Member of the Virginia Senate from the 6th district

In office

January 9, 2008 – January 11, 2014


Preceded by Nick Rerras

Succeeded by Lynwood Lewis

Personal details

Born Ralph Shearer Northam
September 13, 1959

Guns
Health care
Medicaid expansion
Immigration
LGBTQ rights
Marijuana
Donald Trump
Voting rights, campaign law, and redistricting
Personal life
Electoral history
Footnotes
References
Further reading
External links

	Nassawadox, Virginia, U.S.
Political party	Democratic
Spouse(s)	Pam Northam (m. 1987)
Children	2
Residence	Executive Mansion
Education	Virginia Military Institute (BS) Eastern Virginia Medical School (MD)
Signature	
Website	Government website (https://www.governor.virginia.gov/)
	Military service
Allegiance	 United States
Branch/service	 United States Army
Years of service	1984–1992
Rank	 Major
Unit	Army Medical Corps

Early life, family history, and education

Northam was born in the town of Nassawadox on Virginia's Eastern Shore on September 13, 1959.^{[3][4]} He and his older brother of two years, Thomas, were raised on a water-side farm, just outside Onancock, Virginia.^[5] The family grew a variety of crops and tended livestock on their seventy-five-acre (30 ha) property.^[6] As a teenager, Northam worked on a ferry to Tangier Island and as a deckhand on fishing charters; he also worked on a neighbor's farm and as a "stock boy" at Meatland grocery store.^{[5][7][8]} He and Thomas attended desegregated public schools.^{[5][9]} Northam graduated from Onancock High School, where his class was predominately African American.^[10]

Northam's mother, Nancy B. Shearer, was originally from Washington, D.C. She was a part-time nurse at Northampton-Accomack Memorial Hospital, and her father was a surgeon.^{[7][11][12]} Nancy Shearer died in 2009.^[7] Northam's father, Wescott B. Northam, served as a lawyer and is a veteran of World War II; he entered politics in the 1960s, serving three terms as Commonwealth's Attorney for Accomack County, Virginia. After losing election to a fourth term, Wescott Northam was appointed as a Circuit Court judge for Accomack and Northampton counties.^{[5][7][11][12]} Wescott Northam's own father, Thomas Long Northam, had served as a judge in the same court.^[7]

Thomas Long Northam died when Wescott Northam was only fourteen, and a few years later, the family farm in Modest Town, Virginia, where Wescott had been born, was sold.^{[5][9]} The farm had first come into the family through Ralph Northam's great-great-grandfather, James, who along with his son, Levi Jacob, had owned slaves – one of whom, Raymond Northam, was freed to enlist in the 9th Regiment of Colored Troops (Union Army, Civil War). Ralph Northam was unaware of his family's slave-owning history until his father conducted research into their ancestry during the time of Northam's gubernatorial campaign.^[9]

In high school, Northam was voted "Most Likely to Succeed"^[10] and graduated as salutatorian.^[13] He was a member of his school's basketball and baseball teams.^{[7][10]} Northam graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1981, where he served as president of VMI's honor court and received a bachelor's degree in biology.^{[14][15][16]} He went on to Eastern Virginia Medical School, earning his M.D. degree in 1984.^[14]

U.S. Army and medical career

From 1984 to 1992 he served as a United States Army medical officer. During his Army service, he completed a pediatric residency at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, followed by a child neurology fellowship at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. and Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland.^[17] During Operation Desert Storm, he treated evacuated casualties at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany.

Northam was discharged from the U.S. Army in 1992 at the rank of major, after having completed eight years of service.^[18] Since 1992,^[19] Northam has been a pediatric neurologist at Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters in Norfolk, Virginia.^[20]

Early political career

Prior to entering politics, Northam voted for Republican George W. Bush in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, a fact that opponents raised in later Democratic primaries.^{[21][22]} Northam says that he was apolitical at the time and regretted those votes,^[22] saying: "Politically, there was no question, I was underinformed."^[13]

Senate of Virginia (2008–2014)

Northam first ran for office in 2007 in the 6th Senate district, which includes the Eastern Shore of Virginia; Mathews County, on the Middle Peninsula; and parts of the cities of Norfolk and Virginia Beach.^[8] He was unopposed for the Democratic nomination. On November 6, 2007, he defeated Nick Rerras, a two-term Republican incumbent, 17,307 votes to 14,499.^[23]

He was re-elected in November 2011, defeating Ben Loyola Jr., a defense contractor, 16,606 votes to 12,622.^[24]

One of Northam's first major activities as a state legislator was to lead an effort to pass a ban on smoking in restaurants in Virginia. The bill failed the first time, but it passed the next year and Governor Tim Kaine signed it into law.^{[25][26]}



Northam in 2008

In 2009, Northam – a self-described "conservative on fiscal issues and liberal on social issues"^[27] – was the subject of an attempt by state Senate Republicans to get him to switch parties.^[28] This action would have given Republicans control of the State Senate, but after news of the imminent switch broke on Twitter, Democrats held a closed-door meeting, and Northam reiterated that he was not leaving the party.^[29] He later said, "I guess it's nice to be wanted, but I'm a Democrat, and that's where I'm staying."^[30]

Lieutenant Governor of Virginia (2014–2018)

Northam ran for Lieutenant Governor of Virginia in the 2013 election.^[31] Northam competed against U.S. Chief Technology Officer Aneesh Chopra for the Democratic nomination.^[32] On June 11, 2013, Northam won the Democratic primary over Chopra with 54% of the vote to Chopra's 46%.^{[33][34]}

On November 5, 2013, Northam was elected as Virginia's 40th Lieutenant Governor over Republican E. W. Jackson, receiving 55% of the vote to Jackson's 45%.^[35] Northam was the first Democrat since Tim Kaine in 2001 to be elected Lieutenant Governor of Virginia.



Northam ran for lieutenant governor as Terry McAuliffe's running mate.

Governor of Virginia (2018–present)

Election

In February 2015, just over a year into his term as lieutenant governor, Northam confirmed his interest in running for Governor of Virginia in 2017.^{[36][37]} He made these intentions official on November 17, 2015, via an email to supporters.^[38]

In the Democratic primary, Northam faced Tom Perriello, who had previously served as a Congressman from Virginia and as a diplomat in the Obama administration.^{[39][40]} The primary campaign was often described as a proxy battle between the Bernie Sanders/Elizabeth Warren wing of the Democratic Party, represented by Perriello, and the Hillary Clinton wing, represented by Northam,^[39] although this take was dismissed as little more than a "talking point" by *The Washington Post*'s editorial board, which praised both candidates and wrote, "the policy differences between the two, though real, are not enormous".^[41] *The Washington Post* endorsed Northam primarily on the basis of his "experience" and "temperament".^[41] In its endorsement, the publication explained that the next governor would likely have to work with a Republican-controlled legislature and wrote,

"If any Democratic governor can nudge GOP majorities in his direction, it's Mr. Northam. That matters in a state where governors, barred from running for consecutive terms, have one brief shot at getting things done."^[41]

On June 13, 2017, Northam won the Democratic nomination with 56% of the vote to Perriello's 44%.^[42] In the general election, Northam faced Ed Gillespie, who had previously served as Counselor to the President under George W. Bush, chair of the Republican National Committee, and chair of the Republican Party of Virginia.^{[43][44]} Northam's campaign funds were heavily depleted by the end of the primary race. He was left with around \$1.75 million, which amounted to roughly half of Gillespie's remaining funds.^[45] Northam quickly gained the advantage however – by the end of the summer, his available funds had grown twice as large as Gillespie's, with two months left in the campaign. Northam led Gillespie among small donors, as well: "5,900 donations under \$100 to Gillespie's 2,100."^[46]

In October 2017, the Northam campaign released a small number of flyers omitting Northam's running-mate for lieutenant governor, Justin Fairfax. These were released at the request of Laborers' International Union of North America, which had endorsed only part of that year's Democratic ticket.

Northam and that year's Democratic nominee for Attorney General, Mark Herring, were both endorsed by LIUNA and were both included on the flyer. LIUNA withheld its endorsement from Fairfax and explained that Fairfax opposes the construction of natural gas pipelines that are favored by the organization. As Fairfax is black, while Northam and Herring are both white, some activists criticized the decision to accommodate LIUNA's request. All houses that received the LIUNA flyers also received standard campaign flyers including Fairfax.^{[47][48]}

During the campaign, Gillespie and President Donald Trump accused Northam of being responsible for the increased activities of the MS-13 gangs and of being "in favor of sanctuary cities that let dangerous illegal immigrants back on the streets."^{[49][50]} Gillespie and Trump said that Northam had been the deciding vote to stop a Republican bill in the state Senate which would have banned sanctuary cities and that this contributed to the surge in MS-13 violence; a notion that FactCheck.org found to be "misleading".^[49] *The Washington Post* and CNN noted that there are no actual sanctuary cities in Virginia.^{[50][51]} Gillespie himself acknowledged that Virginia did not have sanctuary cities.^[50] *The Washington Post* furthermore noted that there is no evidence that sanctuary cities increase crime or gang activity,^[52] and that Virginia communities with higher immigrant populations have lower crime rates.^[53]

Later that month, the Latino Victory Fund, which was supporting Northam's campaign, released an ad in which a pickup truck, adorned with a Gillespie bumper sticker, a "Don't tread on me" license plate, and a Confederate flag, chases down minority children and corners them in an alley – one of the children in the ad then wakes up, revealing the scene to have been a nightmare.^{[54][55]} Although Northam and his campaign were not involved with the ad, Northam initially defended it, saying Gillespie's own ads "have promoted fearmongering, hatred, bigotry, racial divisiveness," and adding, "I mean, it's upset a lot of communities, and they have the right to express their views as well."^[56] The ad was pulled the following day in the hours after the terrorist attack in New York City, in which a man killed several people by running them over with a truck.^{[56][57]} Northam then distanced himself from the ad, re-emphasizing that it was not released by his campaign and saying that it is not one that he would have chosen to run.^[58] A spokesman for the campaign said that the Latino Victory Fund's decision to pull the ad was "appropriate and the right thing to do."^[56] FOX 5 DC reported that the Northam campaign had accepted \$62,000 as an in-kind media contribution from the Latino Victory Fund.^[59]

During the final week of the campaign, Northam stated that he would continue opposing a preemptive ban on sanctuary cities in Virginia, as he had done while serving in the lieutenant governor position, although he also stated that if any sanctuary cities emerged in Virginia, he would support banning them.^[60] In response, the progressive group Democracy for America stated that it stopped direct aid of Northam's campaign.^[61] Howard Dean, who founded Democracy for America, but left the organization in 2016, wrote on Twitter that the organization had discredited itself and called its decision to stop aiding Northam's campaign "incredibly stupid".^[62] Democracy for America had already stopped collecting data for Northam and had ceased mentioning him in get-out-the-vote calls, due to the Northam campaign's decision to release LiUNA's flyers omitting Justin Fairfax.^{[63][64]}

Northam held campaign rallies with former President Barack Obama^[65] and former Vice President Joe Biden during the general election campaign.^[66]

According to *The Washington Post*, while campaigning for governor, Northam owned stock in several companies "doing extensive work in Virginia". Northam stated during the campaign that if elected governor, he would place his financial investments into a blind trust, so as to avoid any potential conflicts of interest.^[67]

According to a November 3, 2017 report by the Virginia Public Access Project, Northam raised \$33.8 million to Gillespie's \$24.5 million.^[68]

Northam was elected 73rd Governor of Virginia on November 7, 2017, defeating Ed Gillespie in the general election with a larger-than-expected nine-point margin of victory.^[69]

Tenure

Northam was sworn in as Governor of Virginia at noon on January 13, 2018 at the State Capitol.^[70] He became the second Eastern Shore native to serve as Governor of Virginia, after Henry A. Wise (who was elected in 1855)^{[71][70][71]} and the second alumnus of Virginia Military Institute to serve as governor, after Westmoreland Davis (who was elected in 1917).^[70] A majority of Northam's cabinet secretaries are female, a first in Virginia history.^[72] Residents from every county in Virginia attended Northam's inauguration (which reportedly marked another first for the state)^{[73][74]} and twenty-six groups participated in the inaugural parade, which has been called the largest and most diverse in state history.^{[74][75]}

Leading up to his inauguration, Northam announced that he would establish a new cabinet-level position, Chief Workforce Advisor, which would be responsible for coordinating the state's workforce development programs.^[76] To fill the position, Northam appointed Megan Healy, who had served as assistant vice chancellor for academic services and employer partnerships at the Virginia Community College System and as the director of STEM-H during the McAuliffe administration.^{[76][77]} Healy's husband served on Northam's transition team.^[76]

Response to Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center lawsuit

In June 2018, six months into Northam's governorship, a class action lawsuit was publicly disclosed, which had been filed the previous October, claiming that Latino teenage detainees at the Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center had been physically abused by staff members there. Most of the plaintiffs were being held at the facility on immigration charges. The abuse described in the lawsuit was alleged to have occurred from 2015 through 2018. The Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center denied all claims in the lawsuit, while Northam called the allegations "disturbing" and directed state agencies to conduct an investigation.^{[78][79]} Around two months later, the investigation concluded with no findings of ongoing abuse. Allegations of past abuse were not included within the scope of the investigation, and the lawsuit is still pending. Northam urged the facility to adopt new practices, including additional training for staff members, recommended by the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice.^[80] As youth held in Virginia facilities on immigration charges are there through outside contracts with the federal government, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice lacked oversight of these youth when the investigation began. In September of that year, the department expanded its authority to include oversight of youth held through any outside contract in Virginia facilities.^{[81][82]}

Yearbook discoveries and apology for blackface

On February 1, 2019, images from Northam's medical school yearbook were published on the far-right website Big League Politics.^{[83][84][85]} The photos showed an image of an unidentified person in blackface and an unidentified person in a Ku Klux Klan hood on Northam's page in the



Northam meeting with volunteers in Blacksburg, Virginia, in 2017

yearbook.^{[86][87][88]} A spokesman for Eastern Virginia Medical School confirmed that the image appeared in its 1984 yearbook.^[89] Shortly after the news broke, Northam apologized for appearing in the photo^[89] and issued a statement saying,

"Earlier today, a website published a photograph of me from my 1984 medical school yearbook in a costume that is clearly racist and offensive. I am deeply sorry for the decision I made to appear as I did in this photo and for the hurt that decision caused then and now. This behavior is not in keeping with who I am today and the values I have fought for throughout my career in the military, in medicine, and in public service. But I want to be clear, I understand how this decision shakes Virginians' faith in that commitment. I recognize that it will take time and serious effort to heal the damage this conduct has caused. I am ready to do that important work. The first step is to offer my sincerest apology and to state my absolute commitment to living up to the expectations Virginians set for me when they elected me to be their Governor."^{[90][91][92]}



Photograph from Northam's page in his medical school yearbook

Prior to issuing his apology, Northam had privately reacted in confusion to the photo and told several people that he did not believe that he was either of the men depicted in the photo.^[93] Early that evening, he had also told Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax that although he had no recollection of the photo, he considered it a possibility that he was one of the two men depicted.^{[94][95]} According to *The Washington Post*, "two people familiar with the events of that evening" said that Northam "decided to take the blame" for the photo due to the pressure on him to issue a statement, even though at the time, Northam was still confused about the photo's origins.^[93]

Two days earlier on January 30, Northam had made controversial comments about abortion during a WTOP interview about the Repeal Act, where he stated that if a severely deformed or otherwise non-viable fetus was born after an unsuccessful abortion attempt, "the infant would be resuscitated if that's what the mother and the family desired, and then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother."^[96] Conservative politicians and media figures characterized Northam's comments as promoting infanticide.^[97] After the yearbook photo was publicized, many conservative media outlets compared the two controversies and described them as a "bad week" for the governor.^{[98][99]} According to the *Washington Post*, the photo was sent as a tip to Big League Politics, the website that first published the photo on February 1, by one or more medical school classmates who were concerned about Northam's abortion comments.^[84]

The Virginia Senate's Democratic leader, Dick Saslaw, was among the few politicians who initially defended Northam.^[100] but later joined with the rest of his caucus in calling for Northam's resignation.^[101] Most other prominent Virginia politicians, including former governor Terry McAuliffe, under whom Northam served as lieutenant governor,^[102] the Speaker of the House of Delegates,^[103] the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus,^[104] senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner in a joint statement with Rep. Bobby Scott,^[105] and both the Republican Party of Virginia and Democratic Party of Virginia, called on him to resign.^{[106][107][108]} President Donald Trump decried the photo, as well as Northam's earlier comments on abortion, as "unforgivable".^[109] Several prominent national Republicans, such as House

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Republican National Committee chair Ronna Romney McDaniel joined in calling for Northam's resignation.^{[110][111]} Major national Democratic officials also called for Northam to step down, including 2020 presidential candidates Tulsi Gabbard, Julian Castro, Cory Booker, Kirsten Gillibrand, Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris,^{[112][113]} House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic Governors Association,^{[114][115]} former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,^[116] Senator Bernie Sanders,^[117] and former Vice President of the United States Joe Biden.^[118] Faced with increasing calls for his resignation from fellow Democrats, Northam reportedly considered leaving the Democratic Party and trying to hold on to the governorship as an independent.^{[119][120]}

After issuing his apology and as pressure mounted for his resignation, Northam called friends and family to determine whether the photo actually depicts him.^[121] The following morning, Northam told staffers that he was convinced he was not in the photo.^[93] Sleep-deprived and ignoring the protests of some staffers, Northam held a press conference that afternoon,^[93] in which he publicly denied that he was either of the men in the photo, but did admit to having "darkened [his] face" with shoe polish as part of a Michael Jackson costume around the same time.^[122] Reaction to the press conference was intensely negative and calls for Northam's resignation continued.^[93]

CBS News also unearthed Northam's Virginia Military Institute yearbook, which listed "Coonman", a racial slur, as one of Northam's nicknames; Northam told reporters that two people referred to him by that name, and said that he regretted the presence of the nickname in his yearbook.^[123] Northam says that he does not understand why that nickname was bestowed on him.^{[124][125]}

A months-long investigation into the photo that appeared in the 1984 Eastern Virginia Medical School yearbook could not "conclusively" determine who is in the photo or even how the image came to be there. A team hired by EVMS released a 55-page report May 22, 2019, saying: "We could not conclusively determine the identity of either individual depicted in the photograph." McGuireWoods contacted over 80 people connected to the school, including five members of their yearbook staff at the time.^[126]

Despite the yearbook scandal, as well as those surrounding Virginia's other two elected statewide officials: Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax and state Attorney General Mark Herring, the Democratic Party of Virginia won control of both the Virginia Senate and the Virginia House of Representatives in the statewide elections that November, amid some predictions that the scandals could negatively impact Democratic success in the coming elections.^[127]

Pledge to combat racial inequity

Facing widespread calls for his resignation, Northam chose to remain in office but made a public commitment to focus the remainder of his gubernatorial term on racial justice.^{[128][129][130]} He then joined with his cabinet and the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus to develop remedies to Virginia's racial inequities in areas such as health care, housing, and transportation. Among the priorities that were explored were plans for closing the racial disparity in Virginia's maternal mortality rate, increasing affordable housing and funding for public transportation, supporting minority-owned businesses,



Ralph Shearer Northam
"Goose" "Coonman"
Oranock, Va
Brigade-Armory / Armor

Northam's 1981 VMI yearbook photograph included the nicknames "Goose" and "Coonman"

removing Confederate monuments from public spaces, removing racist remnants of the Jim Crow era from state lawbooks, rethinking the state's approach to how African American history is taught in public schools, and establishing sensitivity training for state agencies.^{[128][131]}

On March 22, 2019, Northam signed a bill, introduced by the chairman of Virginia's Legislative Black Caucus, Lamont Bagby, establishing the Virginia African American Advisory Board; the board is designed to consist of twenty-one non-legislative citizens appointed by the governor, at least fifteen of whom must be black, and additionally, the board includes five members of the governor's cabinet.^[a] The board's purpose is to advise the governor on how to best serve African Americans living in the state. Comparable boards for the state's Latino and Asian communities had already existed, and Bagby called the African American Advisory Board "far overdue". Upon establishing the board, Northam said that it would "ensure the voices of all Virginians are heard, particularly those from underrepresented and historically disenfranchised communities."^{[133][134]}

In May of that year, Northam announced his intent to establish a new cabinet-level position, Chief Diversity Officer. This position would be responsible for advancing equity and inclusion throughout the state government's operations.^{[135][136][137]} Virginia is considered to be the first state in the country to establish such a position at the cabinet-level.^{[136][137]} On September 9, Northam named Janice Underwood as the inaugural Chief Diversity Officer. Underwood had previously led diversity initiatives at Old Dominion University.^{[136][138]} Among the issues that Underwood has focused on as Chief Diversity Officer are supporting small businesses owned by women, minorities, and disabled veterans, reducing inequities in health care, and diversifying employment in the state's public and private sectors.^[139]

Covid 19 pandemic response

In March 2020, as a response to the Covid 19 pandemic, Northam requested that the Supreme Court of Virginia issue a moratorium against evictions. A moratorium was subsequently issued but expired in June. Northam then requested that the moratorium be extended and the court agreed to do so in August. In July, after the initial moratorium had lapsed, eviction cases were opened throughout the state, and those cases have continued to proceed even after the moratorium was extended in August. The extended moratorium expired September 7. The Supreme Court of Virginia denied Northam's request for a second extension of the moratorium but has declared that a federal moratorium against evictions should be recognized in Virginia. Affordable housing advocates have asked Northam to issue an executive order banning evictions in Virginia during the pandemic. Northam has not issued one, suggesting that such an order may face legal challenges.^{[140][141][142]}

Political positions

The Washington Post described Northam as a moderate state senator who moved to the left on some issues during the 2017 gubernatorial Democratic primary, such as support for a \$15 minimum wage and opposition to a state constitutional amendment enshrining right-to-work legislation.^[143]

Abortion

Northam supports abortion rights.^[144] In the Virginia General Assembly, he opposed a bill to mandate vaginal ultrasounds for women seeking abortions, and voted against the bill when it was revised to mandate only abdominal ultrasounds.^[145] He was endorsed in the 2017 Democratic gubernatorial primary by the abortion rights group NARAL and its Virginia affiliate.^[146] Northam has argued for

reducing abortion rates through education and expanding access to contraceptives.^[144] Planned Parenthood pledged to spend \$3 million supporting Northam in his 2017 general election campaign for governor.^[147] Northam opposes banning abortions after 20 weeks through a state version of the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.^[148]

For third-trimester abortions, Northam supports Virginia's current law requiring certification by multiple physicians.^{[149][150][b]} During a January 2019 radio interview, Northam said that third-trimester abortions may be done in cases of a non-viable fetus or severe deformity. If a delivery occurred in such cases, Northam further stated that, "The infant would be resuscitated if that's what the mother and the family desired, and then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother."^{[149][152][153]} This statement drew intense criticism from Republican politicians nationwide, many of whom accused Northam of supporting infanticide.^{[96][97][154][c]} Northam's office refuted the criticism as a mischaracterization of his comments.^{[155][156]}

Civil rights

On March 8, 2019, Northam signed a bill repealing a minimum wage exemption that had applied to several jobs historically associated with black workers; a remnant of the Jim Crow era, the exemption had applied to shoe-shiners, ushers, doormen, concession attendants, and theater cashiers.^{[157][158][159]} A month before signing this bill, Northam had faced scandals over racist content found in his college and medical school yearbooks and responded to calls for his resignation by pledging to prioritize racial justice issues throughout the remainder of his term in office.^[128] On June 4 of that year, he announced plans to continue repealing all discriminatory state laws that had been passed during the Jim Crow era. To identify those laws, he established the Commission to Examine Racial Inequity in Virginia Law, which formed with nine members on September 3.^{[157][160][161]} The commission was assisted by students from Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Richmond School of Law, and the University of Virginia School of Law.^[161] On December 5, the commission issued a report recommending the repeal of 98 laws, most of which had already become legally unenforceable.^{[161][162][163]} The commission stated, "Though most of these pieces of legislation are outdated and have no legal effect, they remain enshrined in law. The Commission believes that such vestiges of Virginia's segregationist past should no longer have official status."^[161]

Among the laws identified in the 2019 report are a ban on interracial marriage, a requirement that spouses be identified by race on marriage licenses,^[d] policies that prevented school integration, requirements that neighborhoods, trains, playgrounds, and steamboats be racially segregated, and a poll tax.^{[161][162][168]} These laws were repealed in a bipartisan package of bills signed by Northam on April 11, 2020.^{[169][170]}

On June 11 of that year, Northam authorized the commission to enter a new phase of research; this phase is focused on identifying modern laws and regulations that have contributed to social inequities in Virginia. The commission will also devise policies to remedy those inequities.^[171] Chief Deputy Attorney General of Virginia Cynthia Hudson, who chairs the commission, said about this second phase of work, "it's certainly not my expectation to find the expressly racist language and intent that we found in the Acts of Assembly from generations ago. So, the nature of the work will turn to trying to discern what the impact is from an equity perspective of current law that might not on its face appear discriminatory, but in its effect, disproportionately impacts people of color and other under-represented communities."^[163] Northam also signed legislation in 2020 establishing a separate commission tasked with studying the impacts of slavery and discrimination in Virginia.^{[169][172]}

On March 4, 2020, Northam signed a bill making Virginia the fourth US state and first southern state to ban racial hair discrimination.^[173] The bill passed with unanimous support in the state senate. Upon signing the bill, Northam remarked, "It's pretty simple - if we send children home from school because their hair looks a certain way, or otherwise ban certain hairstyles associated with a particular race - that is discrimination. This is not only unacceptable and wrong, it is not what we stand for in Virginia."^{[174][175][176]}

On April 11 of the same year, Northam signed the bipartisan Virginia Values Act, which applies anti-discrimination protections to public accommodations. Prior to the bill, Virginia had been one of five US states that did not have any such protections.^[177] The Virginia Values Act also updated Virginia's existing anti-discrimination laws to add protections on the bases of gender identity, sexual orientation, and veteran's status.^{[178][179]}

Confederate monuments

On the controversies over public monuments to the Confederacy, in June 2017 Northam stated that the statues in the state Capitol that the General Assembly has jurisdiction over "should be taken down and moved into museums", and that the decision on other statues "belongs to local communities."^[26] He has said that there should be more public memorials to historical Virginia civil rights leaders such as Barbara Rose Johns, Oliver Hill, and Samuel Wilbert Tucker.^[26] In August 2017, Northam took a firmer stance, saying, "I believe these statues should be taken down and moved into museums. As governor, I am going to be a vocal advocate for that approach and work with localities on this issue."^[180] Northam later reverted to his original stance that decisions on the monuments should be made locally.^{[181][182]}

In early June 2020, Northam announced the removal of Robert E. Lee Monument on Richmond's Monument Avenue in response to Black Lives Matter protests after the killing of George Floyd.^[183]

Criminal justice

As governor, Northam signed into law a bill imposing a new mandatory minimum sentence for those who are convicted of murdering a police officer. Later during his term, in May 2019, he vowed against signing any further legislation imposing mandatory minimum sentences. In an op-ed for *The Washington Post*, he argued that such legislation is racially discriminatory and leads to over-incarceration.^{[184][185][186]}

Under reforms signed into law by Northam in 2020, juveniles tried as adults in Virginia are no longer subject to mandatory minimum sentences and can be eligible for parole^[6] after twenty years.^{[189][190][191]} In 2020, Northam also signed a bill requiring judicial approval for juveniles under the age of sixteen to be tried as adults; Virginia law had previously given prosecutors the discretion to charge juveniles fourteen years or older as adults.^{[192][193][194]}

Felony larceny threshold

After Northam was elected governor, *The Washington Post* identified an opportunity for bipartisan legislation in raising Virginia's felony larceny threshold.^[195] Set at \$200, the threshold was then tied with New Jersey for lowest in the nation.^{[196][197]} The threshold's value had not been raised since 1980, and had it kept pace with inflation, would have been equal to around \$600 in 2017.^[198] Outgoing governor Terry McAuliffe attempted during his final year in office to raise the threshold's value to \$500 but was unable to advance such a proposal through the legislature.^{[199][200]} During Virginia's 2017

gubernatorial campaign, Northam's opponent, Ed Gillespie, voiced support for the \$500 threshold,^[201] while both Northam and McAuliffe called for the threshold to be raised even further to \$1,000,^{[197][198]} a value more closely aligned with the thresholds used in a majority of other states.^[198]

In February of 2018, about a month after his inauguration as governor, Northam struck a deal with the Republican-controlled legislature to raise the felony threshold to \$500; in exchange, Northam gave support to Republican-sponsored legislation that would require criminal defendants seeking parole to first pay full restitution to victims.^{[198][202]} McAuliffe had vetoed a comparable restitution bill the previous year. *The Washington Post*'s editorial board called Northam's compromise "a small step toward fairer justice in Virginia", but voiced concern that the restitution bill would place an onerous burden on poor defendants; the editorial board also noted that the \$500 threshold would still be one of the country's lowest and, when adjusted for inflation, under the level that had been set in 1980.^[202]

On March 4, 2020, after Democrats won control of the Virginia state legislature, Northam signed a bill raising the felony larceny threshold to \$1000.^{[203][204][205]} *The Roanoke Times* described this bill as one of Northam's "criminal justice reform priorities".^[204] Upon signing the bill, Northam said, "While we will continue to hold people accountable for their actions, it's important that the punishment fit the crime. This bill will bring Virginia in line with the majority of states in our country, modernizing our law to ensure that one mistake does not define a person's entire life."^[205]

Limited reinstatement of parole

During Virginia's 2020 legislative session, there was discussion among the General Assembly's newly Democratic majority about the possibility of fully reinstating parole, which had been abolished by the state in 1995^[f] under then-governor George Allen.^{[206][208][209]} Northam's administration argued that Virginia's parole ban had strained prison capacities, exacerbated the state's racial inequities, and led to an increase in elderly inmates receiving costly medical care from the state.^[208] A full repeal of the parole ban was not approved in 2020, although legislation signed by Northam that year reinstated parole in limited circumstances.^[210]

One of these circumstances dealt with certain prisoners sentenced during the first five years of the parole ban.^[208] Before the 2000 state Supreme Court case *Fishback V. Commonwealth* ruled that juries in Virginia must be informed of the state's parole ban, many juries in Virginia had been unaware of the ban.^[g] Prisoners sentenced by these uninformed juries came to be known as the "Fishback inmates".^{[212][213]} Virginia is one of the few states where juries can determine sentencing, and in some cases, an uncorrected misconception among juries that parole still existed in Virginia increased the length of sentences imposed on these inmates.^{[211][212]} The court's ruling in *Fishback V. Commonwealth* granted no relief to the Fishback inmates, as it had no affect on sentences already imposed.^{[211][213]}

Policy on suspended driver's licenses

During their respective gubernatorial campaigns, Northam and his opponent, Ed Gillespie, both criticized Virginia's practice of suspending driver's licenses for unpaid court-ordered fines and fees.^{[201][214][215]} Northam campaigned on an official end to the practice, while Gillespie wanted to "functionally end" the practice through the use of payment plans.^{[201][h]} Northam assumed the governorship at a time when Virginia was facing a class action lawsuit over this issue.^[222]

In the year Northam was elected governor, the Legal Aid Justice Center estimated that Virginia's policy of suspending driver's licenses for unpaid payments had impacted around one million people.^{[223][224]} Although *The Washington Post* noted that similar policies were facing scrutiny at that time throughout

much of the United States,^{[219][225]} the publication also wrote that Virginia's policy was among the strictest in the nation, as Virginia was one of the few states where the debt-based suspension of driver's licenses was not limited to cases in which money was owed due to traffic violations.^[226]

In January 2019, the Virginia state Senate passed a bill that would have repealed the penalty of suspending driver's licenses for unpaid debt, but that February, a Republican-controlled subcommittee in the House of Delegates defeated the bill.^{[227][228]} In March of that year, a repeal of this penalty was included by Northam as an amendment to the state budget.^[229] The penalty could not be fully repealed by an amendment. Instead, the amendment was able to pause the penalty for one year.^{[230][231]} Virginia's legislature adopted the amendment, which also reinstated driver's licenses that had been suspended solely for unpaid debt.^{[232][233]}

While advocating for the repeal, Northam explained his views on the issue, saying, "Often, people don't pay court costs because they can't afford it. Suspending their license for these unpaid fees makes it that much harder on them."^[225] Northam argued that the repeal would make it easier for people to pay their debt, noting that people who are prevented from legally driving struggle to earn an income.^[231]

The Washington Post's editorial board found that Virginia's debt-based suspension of driver's licenses had a disproportionate impact on minorities.^[234] The publication described the repeal of this policy as a priority for the *state's Legislative Black Caucus*.^[235] When Northam proposed repealing the policy through a budget amendment, he was facing criticism over a racist photograph that appears in his medical school yearbook; Northam's amendment proposal came as part of a commitment to focus his remaining tenure on combating racial inequities in Virginia.^[229]

In April 2020, after Democrats took control of the state legislature and before the previous year's budget amendment was set to expire, Northam signed a bipartisan bill making the effects of the amendment permanent.^{[194][236][237]} That same month, Northam signed separate bills ending the suspension of driver's licenses in Virginia for non-driving related drug offenses^{[192][194][238]} and repealing Virginia's mandatory minimum sentence of ten days for a third or subsequent conviction of driving with a suspended license.^{[239][240][241]} Virginia was among the first US states to end the practice of suspending driver's licenses for outstanding debt^{[194][239]} but was the 45th state to end the practice of suspending driver's licenses for non-driving related drug offenses.^[238]

Death penalty

Ralph Northam opposes the death penalty.^[242]

Economy

Northam supports increasing Virginia's minimum wage, which at \$7.25 an hour, has not surpassed the federally mandated level set in 2009.^{[243][244]} While serving as lieutenant governor in 2014, Northam broke a tie in the Virginia state Senate, passing a bill that would have increased the state's minimum wage by increments.^{[243][245][246]} Under the bill, the state's minimum wage would have settled at \$9.25 an hour, after two years.^[247] The measure was never enacted due to failing in the Virginia House of Delegates.^{[243][246][247]} Three years later, as a gubernatorial candidate, Northam proposed that Virginia set its minimum wage at \$15 an hour^[i] and expressed plans to campaign as governor against Republican state legislators who continued to oppose a higher minimum wage.^[243] Northam has pointed to the costliness of transportation in rural parts of the state to dispute the notion that a \$15 minimum wage is

too high for those areas.^[248] During Northam's first year as governor, he vetoed a bill passed by the Republican-controlled legislature that would have banned localized minimum wages for government contractors.^[249]

During his 2017 campaign for governor, Northam was endorsed by the Laborers' International Union of North America; the union praised Northam for his opposition to a "right-to-work" amendment to the Virginia state constitution.^[250] Northam criticized the repeal of the car tax under former Governor Jim Gilmore because of its impact on both K-12 and higher education, saying Virginia still has not recovered.^[251]

Northam "has called for phasing out the grocery tax on low-income people and ending business taxes in struggling rural areas."^[252] He has called for a bipartisan reform commission to make recommendations on state tax policy.^{[252][67]}

Education

Northam opposes public funding for private schools.^[67]

G3 initiative for state-funded tertiary education

While campaigning for governor, Northam proposed a plan for Virginia to offer free community college and workforce training to students in high-demand fields who commit to a period of public service.^{[253][254][215]} Northam has called this plan "Get Skilled, Get a Job, Give Back", or "G3" for short, and as governor, he has included G3 as part of his two-year budget proposal, which will be considered in the 2020 legislative session.^[255]

For students participating in G3, the state of Virginia would cover educational expenses that remain after other forms of financial aid have been used; as such, G3 has been described as a "last-dollar" program.^{[253][255]} It would only be available to students from low-income and middle-income households; the estimated cut-off would be about 400% of the federal poverty level, although this could vary depending upon a household's overall ability to afford costs. While participating in G3, students would have to maintain at least a 2.0 GPA and would be required to have a three-year graduation plan. Only students eligible for in-state tuition would qualify for the program.^{[255][256]} According to *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Free Lance-Star*, G3 is one of the few free tuition programs in the United States available to students of all ages.^{[257][258]} Returning students, part-time students, and dual enrollment students are all allowed to participate in the program.^{[257][258][259]}

Under G3, the cost of tuition, fees, and books would all be covered, and students receiving Pell Grants would qualify for additional aid.^{[255][256][257]} Community colleges would earn a \$500 financial incentive for each of their G3-participating students receiving a full Pell Grant who completes 30 credits, and an additional \$400 financial incentive would be earned by the community college once each of those same students completes an associate degree.^{[256][257]}

There are no fixed fields of study that would be included within the G3 program; rather, different fields of study could be included on a changing basis, as determined by economic projections and employer needs.^[257] Cybersecurity, coding, clean energy, early childhood education, health care, public safety, and skilled trades are some of the fields of study identified for inclusion.^{[6][253][256]}

Students participating in G3 would be required to fulfill two hours^[j] of public service, community service, or work experience for each of their academic credit hours.^{[255][256]} This requirement could be fulfilled through taking a position with local or state government, joining a nonprofit organization, or working in one of Virginia's economically depressed regions.^{[253][255]}

Environment and energy

Northam accepts the scientific consensus on climate change and as a candidate for governor vowed to lead efforts to fight climate change. He pledged, if elected, to bring Virginia into the United States Climate Alliance, a multi-state agreement to uphold greenhouse gas emissions standards.^[261] Northam has emphasized the negative effects of climate-change-induced sea level rise on Virginia's Tidewater region.^{[26][261]}

During his 2017 campaign for governor, Northam pledged if elected to continue implementing the total maximum daily load limits for nitrogen and phosphorus discharges into Chesapeake Bay, a policy that had reduced harmful algal blooms. Northam said he would continue this policy even if the federal government under Donald Trump cut or eliminated funding for the program. During his campaign, Northam was endorsed by the Virginia League of Conservation Voters and the Virginia Sierra Club.^[262]

Northam has offered conditional support for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, provided that the pipeline's construction is deemed to be environmentally safe.^{[263][264]} He has avoided taking a firm stance on other pipelines such as the Mountain Valley Pipeline.^[265] He opposes both offshore drilling and fracking.^[263]

Northam has supported the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). In 2019, he vetoed a bill that would have prohibited Virginia from entering into the initiative, but in May 2019, he chose not to veto language in the state budget that prohibits spending related to the initiative, because under Virginia law, governors are generally not allowed to issue line-item vetoes of the state budget. According to *The Washington Post*, had Northam issued the veto, it could have been challenged in court by the Republican-controlled legislature, and Northam wanted to avoid a long legal confrontation. Northam has said that he will seek to implement RGGI spending in future budgets.^[266]

In September 2019, Northam signed an executive order establishing a goal for the commonwealth to produce at least 30 percent of its energy from renewable sources in 10 years, a 23 percent improvement on the amount produced at the time he signed the order.^[267] In addition to this, Northam set the goal for the state of Virginia to produce 100 percent of its electricity from carbon-free sources by 2050.^[268]

Family leave and child care

When Northam was inaugurated as governor, the family leave policy for executive branch employees in the state of Virginia applied exclusively to employees who had given birth and offered only partial pay. In June 2018, Northam signed an executive order extending the policy to apply to both mothers and fathers, including not only biological parents but also adoptive and foster parents. Under the new policy, employees receive eight weeks off at full pay.^[269] Earlier in the year, then-Speaker of the House of Delegates Republican Kirk Cox had established a similar policy offering legislative branch employees twelve weeks of paid leave.^{[269][270]}

With regards to private sector employees, Northam has said that he wants to implement tax credits for small businesses that offer paid family leave.^{[196][271]}

In 2018, Northam formed a commission to study the possibility of offering child care to state employees in Richmond. Northam's wife, Pam, serves on the panel.^[269]

Guns

While campaigning for governor, Northam called for new gun control measures in Virginia and often spoke about the issue within the context of his experience treating gunshot victims.^{[196][272]} He then made gun control a priority during his administration. In the 2019 legislative session, Northam introduced gun control measures that failed in the Republican-controlled General Assembly.^[273] After a mass shooting in Virginia Beach that killed 12 people, Northam convened a special legislative session to reconsider gun control legislation, but the General Assembly adjourned after 90 minutes without considering any bills.^{[273][274][275]}

Gun-control measures were then central to the Democratic platform during Virginia's 2019 legislative midterm elections.^[276] Democrats won control of both chambers in the state legislature during those elections, and in April 2020, Northam signed a package of five gun control measures into law.^[273] The package included universal background checks for gun sales in Virginia; a limit of one-per-month on the purchase of handguns; a requirement for the loss or theft of a firearm to be reported within 48 hours (with a civil penalty of up to \$250 for failure to report); an increase in penalties for reckless storage of loaded and unsecured firearms in a way that endangers children under 14 years of age; and an extreme risk protection order (red flag) bill, which provides for a procedure for the temporary removal of guns from people at high risk of self-harm or harm to others.^{[273][276]} Two additional gun-control bills were signed that year after Northam proposed amendments to them: one of those bills requires evidence that anyone subject to a protective order has surrendered their firearms within twenty-four hours and was amended so that those who fail to comply would be found in contempt of court,^{[273][277][278]} the other bill, which allows for municipal regulations of firearms in public buildings, parks, recreation centers, and during public events, was amended to create an exemption for institutions of higher learning.^{[273][276][279]}

The package of gun control legislation supported by Northam in 2020 included an eighth bill that did not pass: it would have banned assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, trigger activators,^[k] and silencers.^{[273][281]} The ban on assault weapons would not have applied to firearms already owned in Virginia.^[130]

The bill limiting handgun purchases to one-a-month reinstates a law that had been repealed in 2012 under then-governor Bob McDonnell; it had originally been passed in 1993 under then-governor Douglas Wilder.^{[282][283]} Virginia was the nineteenth state to pass a red flag law.^{[273][284]}

Health care

Northam supports the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare"), although he has argued that it is in need of improvement.^{[263][285]} After Republican attempts to repeal the law, Northam called for members of Congress to "put a stop to the uncertainty and work on stabilizing and building on the Affordable Care Act's progress."^[286]

Northam opposes a single-payer healthcare system in Virginia, preferring that such a plan be run by the federal government, but supports the creation of a state-run public health insurance option.^[67]

On February 21, 2019, Northam signed a bipartisan bill raising the smoking age in Virginia from eighteen to twenty-one.^{[287][l]}

As governor, Northam has proposed a state budget that would direct \$22 million towards closing the racial disparity in Virginia's maternal mortality rate.^{[131][289]} The plan developed by Northam would aim to eliminate the disparity by 2025.^[290] It would also aim to reduce infant mortality in Virginia. Northam's proposed funding would allow women who qualify for Medicaid solely because of pregnancy to remain covered for a full year after childbirth - Virginia's current policy allows such coverage to last for six months after childbirth - and would allow Medicaid to cover home visitation services for new mothers. Other initiatives that would be covered by the funding include expanding access to contraceptives for poor women in Virginia and expanding access to addiction treatment for mothers in the state.^{[131][289]} Northam has also suggested allowing doulas to be covered by Medicaid in Virginia.^[289]

Medicaid expansion

On June 7, 2018, Northam signed a bipartisan bill expanding Medicaid in Virginia.^[291] This fulfilled one of his central campaign promises.^{[292][293]} Northam's gubernatorial predecessor, Terry McAuliffe, had tried throughout all four years of his own term in office to enact Medicaid expansion, which had been a central promise of his own campaign, but McAuliffe was never able to secure enough support from Republicans, who controlled the state legislature at the time.^{[294][295]} Following the 2017 election, which brought significant gains for Democrats in the Virginia House of Delegates, Republicans still held a narrow legislative majority; during this time however, opposition to Medicaid expansion diminished among Republicans, several of whom were willing to crossover in support of the bill.^[291] Once the bill was enacted on January 1, 2019,^[296] Virginia became the 33rd state to expand Medicaid^{[293][296]} and the first to do so since Louisiana in 2016.^{[297][298]} Enrollment in the expanded program began on November 1, 2018.^[299] By the beginning of 2019, more than 200,000 Virginians had enrolled in Medicaid as part of the expansion.^[300]

As part of a compromise with Republican legislators, Northam agreed to a Medicaid expansion plan that would include a work requirement for most able-bodied, childless adults. The work requirement has not taken effect, as it cannot be implemented without a waiver from the federal government.^{[301][302]} Northam's administration initially sought such a waiver, but following Virginia's 2019 midterm elections, in which Democrats took control of the state legislature, Northam paused Virginia's request for the waiver, which at the time was still pending.^{[302][303]}

Immigration

In his 2007 campaign for state Senate, Northam "advocated for Virginia being 'even more stringent than we are now in fighting illegal immigration,' and said the state should act as 'strong partners' with federal law enforcement."^[304] Northam's rhetoric shifted in his 2017 gubernatorial campaign.^[304] In 2017 Northam pledged to "stand up against ICE" so that "people, especially immigrants, in Virginia aren't living in fear," saying: "Something that we are very proud of in Virginia is that we are inclusive." He continued by saying "We will do everything we can to make sure immigrants are comfortable living here."^[144] Northam opposed President Trump's decision to rescind Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which offered temporary stay for unauthorized immigrants who came to the United States as minors.^[305] Northam said Trump's "decision lacks compassion, lacks moral sense, and lacks economic sense."^[305] Northam supports granting state driver's licenses and in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants.^[304]

In February 2017, while serving as lieutenant governor, Northam cast a tie-breaking vote in the state Senate against a bill to ban sanctuary cities in Virginia.^[60] Northam said he was "proud to break a tie when Republicans tried to scapegoat immigrants for political gain" and that he was "glad to put a stop to" the bill.^[306] In an October 2017 gubernatorial debate, Northam said he did not support sanctuary cities, stating that there currently were none in Virginia, but Northam declined to say whether he would sign a bill as governor that was similar to the one he voted against in the Senate.^[397] In November 2017, Northam clarified that while he would veto any bill pre-emptively banning sanctuary cities in Virginia, he would support a ban, if sanctuary cities began appearing in the state.^[60] In April 2018, as governor, Northam vetoed a law that would have pre-emptively banned sanctuary cities in Virginia.^[308] He vetoed the same legislation again the following year.^[309]

In November 2019, after President Donald Trump issued an executive order allowing states and localities to abstain from refugee resettlement programs, Northam affirmed Virginia's commitment to accepting refugees, writing to Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, "Virginia's lights are on and our doors are open, and we welcome new Virginians to make their homes here...The United States has long presented itself as a haven, a place of stability and economic prosperity. We promote the ideals upon which this country was founded, of liberty and freedom. But to uphold those ideals abroad, we must allow access to them here at home. We must practice what we preach."^[310]

LGBTQ rights

Northam has supported LGBT rights throughout his political career.^{[311][312]} While running for lieutenant governor in 2013, he criticized his Republican opponent, E. W. Jackson, for making what were widely considered to be divisive statements about LGBT individuals. During a debate with Jackson, who is a minister, Northam said, "What I do in church translates to what I do in everyday life. Whether it's said in my church or whether it's said in my medical clinic or whether it's said before the Senate, it's on me and it's what I believe in."^{[313][314]} That summer, when the United States Defense Department began offering marriage benefits to military personnel in same-sex relationships, Northam and Jackson disagreed with each other on the issue. Jackson said that because gay marriage was illegal in Virginia at the time, the state should withhold benefits from gay couples serving in its National Guard, while Northam supported the federal policy. Northam said that equalizing benefits for gay couples in the United States military is about "being fair with those who have served our country."^[315]

During the 2013 campaign, Northam said that opposition to LGBT rights would create an unwelcoming business environment in Virginia.^[316] In 2015, he used his tie-breaking abilities as lieutenant governor to defeat a bill in the state Senate that would have forced Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring to defend the state's gay marriage ban; Herring had argued that the ban was unconstitutional.^[317]

In 2017, while running for governor, Northam spoke against the Physical Privacy Act, a bill proposed that year in Virginia, which if passed, would have required people in government facilities to use restrooms corresponding to the gender specified on their original birth certificates. Northam called the Physical Privacy Act a "job-killing, prejudicial bill".^[318] Later that same year, before Northam was elected governor, the Physical Privacy Act was defeated in the state legislature.^[319]

Northam condemned the decision by President Donald Trump to ban transgender service members from the United States military. Shortly after Trump announced this policy, Northam tweeted, "Anyone who wants to serve our country in the military should be welcomed. They're patriots and should be treated as such."^[320]

Northam's first official action as governor was to sign an executive order banning the executive branch of the state government from discriminating against LGBTQ employees.^{[70][321][322]} At the time of Northam's inauguration, the state of Virginia did not have any legislation protecting LGBTQ individuals from employment discrimination.^{[323][324]} Protections on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity that had been established through an executive order issued by Northam's gubernatorial predecessor, Terry McAuliffe,^[m] were maintained by Northam's own executive order, which went further, introducing, for the first time in Virginia, protection on the basis of gender expression.^{[334][335][332][333][336]}

While serving as lieutenant governor, Northam broke a tie in the state Senate, supporting a bill that would have codified into state law the protections included in McAuliffe's aforementioned executive order.^{[337][325][338]} This bill was defeated in the House of Delegates.^{[339][340]} Legislation that would have codified Northam's own executive order into state law passed with bipartisan support in the state Senate during 2018 and 2019, but was denied a vote both years by Republican leadership in the House of Delegates.^{[341][342][324]} If passed, these bills would have applied to all state and local government employees in Virginia, unlike the aforementioned executive orders, which applied only to employees under the governor's personal authority.^{[328][339]}

An even more expansive anti-discrimination law, the Virginia Values Act, was passed in Virginia with bipartisan support, after the state's 2019 legislative elections flipped control of both the state Senate and the House of Delegates from Republicans to Democrats.^{[177][343][344]} Northam signed the Virginia Values Act into law on April 11, 2020. The bill, which bans discrimination throughout Virginia on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity in both public sector and private sector employment, housing, public accommodations, and credit transactions,^{[345][346][347]} is the first legislation in any southern state to extend anti-discrimination protections to LGBTQ individuals.^{[177][344][348]}

In separate bills signed that same year, Northam expanded gender identity-related rights and protections in Virginia by banning health insurance companies in the state from discriminating on the basis of gender identity;^{[349][350][351]} establishing a statewide standard for the treatment of transgender students in Virginia schools;^{[352][n]} introducing a non-binary gender option on Virginia driver's licenses and IDs;^{[177][353]} and removing gender reassignment surgery as a prerequisite in Virginia for those seeking to change the sex listed on their birth certificates.^{[177][351][354]}

On March 2, 2020, Northam signed a bipartisan bill that made Virginia the twentieth state and first southern state to ban conversion therapy for minors. Upon signing the bill, Northam issued a statement saying, "This issue is personal for me, as a pediatric neurologist who has cared for thousands of children. Conversion therapy is not only based in discriminatory junk-science, it is dangerous and causes lasting harm to our youth. No one should be made to feel wrong for who they are - especially not a child."^[355]

On March 5 of that year, Northam signed a bill establishing that crimes targeting someone because of the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity are to be classified as hate crimes in Virginia.^{[356][357][358]} That same year, Northam also signed bills repealing the state legal code of Virginia's^[o] unenforceable ban on same-sex marriage;^{[351][359][360]} adopting gender-neutral language for spouses throughout state law;^{[177][350][362][363]} and allowing municipalities in Virginia to pass their own laws banning discrimination on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity.^{[350][356][357]}

Marijuana

Northam favors decriminalizing marijuana.^[67]

Donald Trump

In a political commercial called "Listening", run during the Virginia Democratic primary, Northam described the importance to him of listening – as a doctor, to his patients and as lieutenant governor, to his constituents. He ended with, "I've been listening carefully to Donald Trump, and I think he's a narcissistic maniac."^[364] As the general election drew near Northam said, "[I]f Donald Trump is helping Virginia, I'll work with him."^[365] Northam explained the "softer tone": "I think people already know [their opinions of Trump] and they are judging for themselves. What we are talking about as we move forward are the policies that are coming out of Washington that are so detrimental to Virginia".^[365]

Voting rights, campaign law, and redistricting

During his 2017 campaign for governor, Northam said that if elected, he would approve a map of new Virginia legislative and congressional boundaries in the post-2020 redistricting only if it is drawn by a nonpartisan commission.^[366]

In January 2019, Northam introduced legislation including bills to end Virginia's photo ID law and a bill to allow absentee "no-excuse" voting to replace the current law which contains limits. He is also proposing new campaign finance limits that would block direct donations from corporations, cap donations at \$10,000, and prohibit the personal use of campaign funds by lawmakers.^[367]

In October 2019, Northam announced that he had restored the voting rights of more than 22,000 felons who had completed their sentences.^[368]

Personal life

Northam lives in the Executive Mansion in Richmond. He and his wife Pam have two adult children, Wes and Aubrey.^[369] Northam's brother, Thomas Northam, is a lawyer ^[5] and the law partner of Virginia State Senate member Lynwood Lewis, who was elected to the State Senate to replace Northam when he resigned his State Senate seat to assume the position of lieutenant governor. Their father, Wescott Northam, is a retired Accomack County judge, former Commonwealth's Attorney, and Navy veteran.^[370]

Northam belongs to a predominately black Baptist church in Capeville, Virginia^{[93][371][372]} and serves as the vice chair of the Fort Monroe Authority, which oversees Fort Monroe, a Civil War historic site where Union General Benjamin Butler sheltered freed slaves.^[373] In his free time, Northam enjoys working on classic cars.^[374] He owns a 1953 Oldsmobile and a 1971 Corvette.^[375]

Northam is a recreational runner and a competitor in races including the Richmond Road Runners' First Day 5k and the Monument Avenue 10K race.^[376]

Electoral history

Virginia State Senate 6th district election, 2007 ^[377]				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	±
<u>Democratic</u>	Ralph Northam	17,307	54.3%	+16.1
<u>Republican</u>	Nick Rerras	14,499	45.5%	-16.2
Write-ins		45	0.1%	+0.1
Majority		2,808	8.8%	-14.7
Total votes		31,851	100.0%	

Virginia State Senate 6th district election, 2011 ^[378]				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	±
<u>Democratic</u>	Ralph Northam	16,606	56.8%	+2.4
<u>Republican</u>	Benito Loyola Jr.	12,622	43.1%	-3.4
Write-ins		31	0.1%	<-0.1
Majority		3,984	13.6%	+4.8
Total votes		29,259	100.0%	

Virginia Lieutenant Governor Democratic primary, 2013 ^[379]				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	
<u>Democratic</u>	Ralph Northam	78,476	54.2%	
Democratic	Aneesh Chopra	66,380	45.8%	
Majority		12,096	8.4%	
Total votes		144,856	100.0%	

Virginia lieutenant gubernatorial election, 2013 ^[380]				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	±
<u>Democratic</u>	Ralph Northam	1,213,155	55.1%	+11.7
<u>Republican</u>	E. W. Jackson	980,257	44.5%	-12.0
Write-ins		7,472	0.3%	+0.3
Majority		232,898	10.6%	
Total votes		2,200,884	100.0%	

Virginia Governor Democratic primary election, 2017 ^[381]				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	
<u>Democratic</u>	Ralph Northam	303,399	55.9%	
Democratic	Tom Perriello	239,216	44.1%	
Majority		64,183	11.8%	
Total votes		542,615	100.0%	

Virginia gubernatorial election, 2017				
Party		Candidate	Votes	%
	Democratic	Ralph Northam	1,405,175	53.9%
	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Ed Gillespie</u>	1,173,209	45.0%
	<u>Libertarian</u>	Cliff Hyra	27,964	1.1%
Majority			231,966	8.9%
Total votes			2,607,725	100.0%

Footnotes

- a. The board's five seats reserved for state cabinet members are to be filled by the Secretaries of the Commonwealth, Commerce and Trade, Education, Health and Human Resources, and Public Safety and Homeland Security (or by designees for those secretaries).^[132]
- b. This law allows third-trimester abortions to be certified by a single physician if continued pregnancy is found to pose an imminent danger to a woman's life.^[151]
- c. Northam's full answer (https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ralph_Northam#Abortion1) to the abortion question during the interview with NBC4 reporter Julie Carey, WTOP-FM on January 30, 2019
- d. This identification requirement used racially offensive terms and had remained in effect until October 2019, when it was ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge.^{[161][164][165]}
 - One month before the court ruling, Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring had issued a policy allowing couples to opt-out of the racial identification requirement.^{[166][167]}
- e. This reform made Virginia the 23rd state to expand the possibility of parole to juveniles serving life sentences.^{[187][188]}
- f. Prisoners sentenced in Virginia before 1995 were exempt from the state's parole ban.^{[206][207]}
- g. Due to legal ambiguity predating *Fishback V. Commonwealth*, between 1995 and 2000, some juries in Virginia were told about the state's parole ban while others were not.^[211]
- h. Although Northam's gubernatorial predecessor, Terry McAuliffe, shared Northam's stance on ending this practice,^{[199][216]} the Republican-controlled legislature under McAuliffe was unreceptive to the idea.^{[217][218]} McAuliffe signed a bill in May 2017 that made payment plans more accessible for people who owed these costs.^{[219][220][221]}
- i. Northam's Democratic primary opponent, Tom Perriello, had adopted the same position one day before Northam.^[243]
- j. Northam's original proposal for G3, made during his gubernatorial campaign, would have required participating students to perform one year of paid public service.^{[253][260]}
- k. Under President Trump, the executive branch of the federal government issued a ban against trigger activators. Several states have sought to codify their own bans on the devices, so as not to be reliant on federal policy.^[280]
- l. Military service members are exempted from the bill.^[288]

- m. Protection from employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was first introduced in the executive branch of the Virginia state government through a 2005 executive order issued by then-governor Mark Warner.^{[325][326][327]}
 - The protection was maintained by Warner's gubernatorial successor, Tim Kaine^[328] but was then repealed in 2010 by Kaine's own successor, Bob McDonnell.^{[329][330]} In 2014, McAuliffe re-instated the policy and expanded it to include, for the first time in Virginia, protection on the basis of gender identity.^{[331][332][333]}
- n. This bill tasked the Virginia Department of Education with setting statewide standards for the treatment of transgender students and allows additional protections to be added by Virginia school districts. The statewide standards are to be adopted by the 2021-2022 school year.^[352]
- o. Before this bill was enacted, Virginia's ban on same-sex marriage was included in the state legal code and in an amendment to the state constitution. Although this bill repeals the ban only from the state legal code, both bans became unenforceable in 2014.^{[359][360][361]}

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Further reading

- "Senate of Virginia – Ralph S. Northam" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20080805234116/http://sov.state.va.us/SenatorDB.nsf/23b0c13df27a5ef585256fc7004febb2/63f4d6a9bf8073f48525738c004ef69b?OpenDocument>). Archived from the original (<http://sov.state.va.us/SenatorDB.nsf/23b0c13df27a5ef585256fc7004febb2/63f4d6a9bf8073f48525738c004ef69b?OpenDocument>) on August 5, 2008. Retrieved October 25, 2008.
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External links

- Governor of Virginia (<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/>) official government site
- Ralph Northam (https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/Virginia/Government/Executive/Governor_Ralph_Northam) at Curlie
- Ralph Northam (<http://www.vpap.org/candidates/profile/home/67038>) at the Virginia Public Access Project
- Senator Ralph Northam (D-Norfolk) (<https://www.richmondsunlight.com/legislator/rsnortham/>) at Sunlight Richmond
- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?ralphnortham>) on C-SPAN
-
- Profile (<https://www.votesmart.org/candidate/90253>) at Vote Smart

Senate of Virginia		
Preceded by Nick Rerras	Member of the Virginia Senate from the 6th district 2006–2014	Succeeded by Lynwood Lewis
Political offices		
Preceded by Bill Bolling	Lieutenant Governor of Virginia 2014–2018	Succeeded by Justin Fairfax
Preceded by Terry McAuliffe	Governor of Virginia 2018–present	Incumbent
Party political offices		
Preceded by Terry McAuliffe	Democratic nominee for Governor of Virginia 2017	Most recent
U.S. order of precedence (ceremonial)		
Preceded by Mike Pence <i>as Vice President</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Within Virginia	Succeeded by Mayor of city in which event is held
		Succeeded by Otherwise Nancy Pelosi <i>Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives</i>
Preceded by Chris Sununu <i>as Governor of New Hampshire</i>	Order of Precedence of the United States Outside Virginia	Succeeded by Andrew Cuomo <i>as Governor of New York</i>

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